



Perspective Based Diagnosis Through the Lens of Age Stratification Theory in Joe Penhall's *Blue\Orange*

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Abstract

This study examines the generational conflict in the workplace through the lens of the sociology of age stratification theory developed by Matilda White Riley and her association. In *Blue\Orange* by Joe Penhall, the researcher explores the conflict between two psychiatrists, one is a senior consultant and the other is a young trainee. While many studies have tackled different themes in the play; like for example race and mental illness, this study focuses mainly on the conflict of generations in the working place as the driving force of institutional decay. Utilizing the sociology of age stratification as a grounded theory to explore the conflict, this study emphasizes the difference in age as a key factor in social hierarchy and the workplace. Furthermore, it concentrates on the age gap and the tension between age groups. To highlight these tensions, Penhall uses the title “Blue\Orange” as a symbol to show the two sides of the same coin. This paper will focus on the problem that goes beyond just a disagreement on whose diagnosis is right, and it sheds light on the age-based value conflict which eventually exposes the institutional decay.

Keywords: age gap, age stratification theory, conflict, generations, lens, perception.



التشخيص القائم على وجهة النظر من منظور نظرية التراتب العمري في مسرحية برتقالي/ازرق لجو بينهال

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المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الصراع بين الأجيال في مكان العمل من منظور التراتب العمري التي طورتها ماتيلدا وايت رايلي وجمعيتها. في مسرحية "برتقالي/ازرق" لجو بينهال، يستكشف الباحث الصراع بين طبيبين نفسيين، أحدهما استشاري أقدم والآخر متدرب شاب. وبينما تناولت العديد من الدراسات مواضيع مختلفة في المسرحية، مثل العرق والمرض النفسي، تُركز هذه الدراسة بشكل رئيسي على صراع الأجيال في مكان العمل كعامل دافع لتدهور المؤسسات. باستخدام التراتب العمري كنظرية أساسية لاستكشاف هذا الصراع، تؤكد هذه الدراسة على فارق السن كعامل رئيسي في التسلسل الهرمي الاجتماعي ومكان العمل. علاوة على ذلك، تُركز على الفجوة العمرية والتوتر بين الفئات العمرية. ولتسليط الضوء على هذه التوترات، يستخدم بينهال عنوان "البرتقال الأزرق" كرمز يُظهر وجهي العملة نفسها. ستركز هذه الورقة البحثية على المشكلة التي تتجاوز مجرد الخلاف حول التشخيص الصحيح، وتلقي الضوء على صراع القيم القائم على العمر، والذي يكشف في النهاية عن التدهور المؤسسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أجيال، نظرية التراتب العمري، تصور، فجوة عمرية، صراع، منظور

1. Introduction

The concept of generation is not a new term, on the contrary, its date is not specified to a historical period. It is a timeless notion and its foundation is not set by a particular field or major of study. Strauss and How (1997), in *The Fourth Turning* define generation, as " the aggregate of all people born over roughly the span of a phase of life who share a common location in history and, hence, a common collective persona they call them" (p. 25). Straus and How in *The Fourth Turning* argue that generation is formed by history and history is formed by generation. They believe that history goes in a repetitive cycle by which every 80-90-year generations experience the same historical events and they share the same characteristics, and these historical changes are called seasons of history (Strauss and How, 1997).

Although it has been discussed by many scientists, the attribution to the researches goes to Mannheim's work as it helps in understanding the meaning of generation in time and location (Pilcher, 1994). The ongoing transition from one generation to the next is filled with drama. It starts with the distinct behaviors and attitudes of new generations, evolves as older generations respond to these changes, and culminates in a transformation of cultural dynamics; thus, this cycle then repeats, introducing a fresh set of participants (Bengtson and Kuypers, 1971). The overlapping of opinions between two generations creates a conflict which makes it hard for them to communicate notably if both are in a phase of identity loss that Eric Erikson highlights in his works. He, in *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, further stresses the differences between the two as in his words "one generation differs so much from another that items of tradition often become disturbances" (Erikson, 1968, p. 104). But what is conflict and how it arises between generations? As for the term 'conflict', it has varied interpretations based on different academic disciplines; since the research is sociological focused, the definition will be presented precisely from the sociological perspective. Conflict represents a social division among social entities; a primary indicator of conflict is the sense of anger that emerges from one or both parties due to the gap of a major norm (Omelaenko, 2021). Conflicts within and between different social groups can actually hinder the development of relationships which often fades away when people do not engage with one another or accommodate different perspectives. When groups clash over their values and interests, it creates tension between what is currently happening and what some groups hope to achieve (Coser, 1956).

The nineties were a rough and ragged era. The shocking event of the murder of the toddler, Jamie Bulgers, in 1993 by 2 ten-year old boys was the crucial point of change in Britain. Violence, horror, child abuse and racism had an impact on the taste of the movies and writings of the era, precisely after

another violent and racially driven murder of the 18-year-old Stephan Lawrence by a group of white boys in 1993. These propensities were reflected in theatre (Sierz, 2001). The mid-90s, however, is a period that witnessed a remarkable surge in new British theatre writing, referred to In-Yer-Face theatre, which has been described as having a distinctly modern vibe, with urban dialogue filled with themes of sex, drugs, profanity, and shocking violence, all aimed at pushing the audience. By the description of their characters by age, playwrights of this period made it clear that their work is going to be about their generation (Kretzer, 1983). Joe Penhall is one of the playwrights whose writings reflect the problems of the era. Penhall's plays tackle broad themes like mental health, loneliness, and family dynamics, all seen through the small details of daily life.

Blue\Orange (2000), which revolves around a young Black man in England, generational conflict serves as a mediate for exposing the institutional corruption within the healthcare system. Although shows a debate between a supervising consultant psychiatrist and a trainee psychiatrist regarding the decision of whether the patient should be set free or not, many studies have been done about this play, not a single one presented the play from a generational perspective. In the age stratification theory, Riley and her group address this conflict and call for integrating age group to mitigate this clash between age groups. This study is going to adopt this theory in the analysis of *Blue\Orange* as it clearly demonstrates the age gap conflict resulting from different values and traditions. Therefore, the focus of this research will be on the analytical view of it which is going to present the generational conflict that led to indecisive outcomes.

2. Theoretical Framework

In her premise, *Ages in Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Inequality Between Old and Young*, Nancy Foner (1984) defines age stratification as “individuals in a society on the basis of their location in a particular age stratum, have unequal access to valued social roles and social rewards” (p. 5). In other words, the age stratification theory illustrates the influence of age on the individual’s status in society; often leading to advantages and disadvantages based on age but not the individual’s ability and skills. The age stratification theory has really made a significant impact in the field of social gerontology. It is one of the few theories that connects aging concepts to sociology, and it is crucial in highlighting how aging interacts with social structures. Additionally, the sociology of age stratification has been essential in sorting out cross-sectional age differences compare to long-term life course trends. It also helps bridge the gap between individual growth and historical shifts. This perspective emphasizes the diversity within the older population by looking at different cohorts, offering fresh insights into how time, period, and cohort influence experiences (Bengtson et al 80). Age stratification

theory (1972), originally developed by the American gerontologist Matilda White Riley and her colleagues, views age as a key factor in social hierarchy. In *Ages in Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Inequality Between Old and Young* argues that the tension generations became evident. Individuals from both cohort groups fight on who takes control over resources, on the other hand, younger individuals assert their dominance by rebelling against the traditional roles (Nancy Foner, 1984). Irving Philips and Stanislaus Szurek (1970) argue that society influence young individuals to rebel against the inequality of opportunities as they see the decaying of society and culture. Thus, the effects of social experiences on young can lead to tensions. It is believed that the conflict between generation can be also attributed to the fact that in some societies older people constitute a large group which makes them in a position of power. However, in all the cases whether older individuals represent a large group or a smaller one; the main problem between generation can be attributed to time as a great factor in societal development and change.

Riley (1974) in her essay “On the Significance of Age in Sociology”, highlights how generations have different values. She argues that the new generation lives in a world which is different from the previous one and each generation has experienced historical events differently. This means that society changes through the successive cohorts and young generations replace older ones. Furthermore, as society evolves, individuals within a generation start to adopt new behaviors that are typical for their age group. In this study, the researcher attempts to present and critically analyses the problem of generational conflict through the lens of age stratification theory developed by Riley and her colleagues as it represents the differences between generations as the main cause of the conflict. Additionally, the thesis also implements Nancy's Foner book of *Aging in Conflict* which discusses the tensions between generations relying on age stratification theory. In the play examined in this study, there is a conflict between the young and the older individuals as they both hold different characteristics, norms and perceptions to life.

2.1 Related Works

Many researches have delved into the analyses of Joe Penhall's *Blue\Orange*, yet none of these studies tackled the play from the lens of age stratification theory. Thus, this study is going to focus on the generational conflict in the workplace from the perspective of age stratification theory; showcasing the effect of age gap on the institution. Alireza Fakhrkonandeh and Yiğit Sömbül (2021), in “Displaced Metaphor as Madness? A Critical-Clinical Study of Schizophrenia in Joe Penhall's *Blue/Orange*” examine the metaphor of madness as a cultural diagnosis in black people. Throughout history, it is known that and stated by Marwa Mohammed and Sanaa Hassan (2025) “the white elites created the white supremacy to maintain their position in the

society” (248). In “The Blueness of Oranges: Representations of Mental Health in Theatre” Sofia Rocha Rosario (2019) explores the racist nature of the white psychiatrists in diagnosing the black patient. Both psychiatrists disagree on the diagnosis of the patient based on their own viewpoint of the patient based on his race.

3. The Analytical Part: Age Conflict and a Fight for the Merits in Blue\ Orange

The playwright of *Blue\Orange* is clever enough to create such a great piece of work which is open to different interpretations. Starting from the framing of the title, Blue\Orange, the creative decision of choosing two different colors for the title makes the play open to varied understanding notably because colors have different meanings in literature. The title of the play itself suggests different perspectives; it is blue or orange. While the main conflict in the play revolves around the patient’s diagnosis, the young doctor persists about how his patient sees the oranges; are they blue or orange to prove his mental illness. It is in fact a representation of different perspectives and point of views as later will be discovered that the whole play focuses on the argument between the two doctors, and the patient is of a secondary importance for both. Additionally, colors have metaphorical interpretation in English literature, in Western culture precisely, the color blue is usually associated with melancholy, sadness and depression. According to Zhao & Qistina (2024), blue carries unique symbolic significance for certain authors; for example, *The Theory of Colors*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe delves into how blue relates to human psychology. In the play, the patient, Christopher, suffers from borderline personality disorder (BPD) which according to National Institute of Mental Health, is a mental condition that greatly affects an individual’s ability to manage their emotions. This inability to control emotions can lead to increased impulsivity, influence self-perception, and affect relationships with others. Their feelings towards others can change rapidly, swinging from intense affection to strong hate. Further, the choice of blue is not arbitrary, on the contrary, it is in fact a direct message to the reader that the patient suffers from psychological problems that makes him perceive the oranges and insist on them to be blue oranges. In English literature different colors reflect the psychological condition of a character like red, blue, yellow or even pink. However, and according to P. J. Heather (1948), the color orange is one of the few colors mentioned in literature and it was mentioned before by Shakespeare and Shelly referring to nature but has no figurative meaning. Nevertheless, orange, which Christopher refuses to admit, would refer to clarity which he is considerably way far from realizing as he is borderline. To add more emphasis on the argument between the two psychiatrists, the play takes place in a single setting; it is a single room in a psychiatric hospital in London.

Penhall, wants his readers to focus on the relationship between the characters by adding very little details in the room, like for example, "a transparent water cooler, a round table with a large glass of bowl containing three oranges" (Penhall, 2000, p. 5).

The play begins in a hospital consultation room where Bruce, a junior doctor, is having a conversation with his patient, Christopher. The room is equipped with a water cooler and a bowl of oranges. The two men, Bruce and Christopher, appear having a conversation, though some tension exists due to the significance of Christopher's 'big day'. Christopher exhibits signs of restlessness and irritation because Bruce refuses to give him Coke. Bruce reminds Christopher regarding the types of beverages he should avoid, including coffee, Coke, and alcohol. As the dialogue shifts to the topic of drugs, Bruce seems to lose a bit of control over the consultation but attempts to divert the conversation towards Christopher's reason for being in the hospital. It is revealed that Christopher has been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The hardest part for Bruce as a psychiatrist is telling his patient that he is not leaving; it would absolutely be such a disappointment as he keeps reaping "big day". Bruce as a young psychiatrist in his early career, is doing his job by discussing the patient's status. He is talking to Christopher trying to inform him that he is diagnosed with BPD. As Bruce starts to share his ideas about how 'recent developments' might require a fresh look at this diagnosis, Robert walks in with a cup of coffee. Robert is the senior psychiatrist and he is the consultant doctor supervising Bruce. When he walks in, he seems indifferent about Christopher and instead dives into a conversation about his weekend, which included an evening with Bruce and his wife. The age gap and difference can be noticed at the initial stages of the conversation between Robert and Bruce. According to Appelbaum et al (2022), there are different kinds of workplace conflicts like behavioral-based conflict, value-based conflict and identity-based conflicts each of which affect the relationships between generations. For instance, when it comes to behavioral based conflict; one can notice the difference between generations in terms of communication and how different styles of communication leads to conflicts of cooperation and misunderstanding. On the other hand, value-based identity is another form of conflict which basically initiates a huge gap and a big problem which may affect not only individuals but the whole institution. The conflict is obvious between two generations having different values; younger generations frequently perceive older generations as maintaining the status quo, while older generations view the younger ones as hesitant to embrace things as they are. Finally, identity-based conflict occurs when there are differences in how one generation perceives its own identities compared to those of other generations. This type of conflict stems from a common desire to feel

part of a group or from the act of comparing oneself to other groups.

The conflict between the two psychiatrists seems to be mainly value-based. Robert seems to keep going in his talks while Christopher is trying to talk work with him, however, he has got no chance to utter a word yet about Christopher's condition. Bruce is trying to present Christopher to Robert, but Robert keeps talking about last night's events and conversations. While Bruce is trying to talk, Robert seems to talk promising things like getting "big bucks" when becoming a consultant in the future. In *Aging and Society*, volume 3, Riley commented on The Age Discrimination in Employment Act 1967 which prohibits the idea of work promotions based on age and aims to remove age as a disqualifying factor, replacing it with other criteria that are more relevant to job performance. Riley *et al* state that although this act should help evaluate employees on their merit, organizations may use different ways to manipulate it, especially "manipulation of the structure of rewards and opportunities available to the individual (Riley et al 1972, p.175). It is apparent what Robert is saying seems encouraging and at the same time manipulative due to the fact that Bruce is seeking a promotion which is obvious as he invited him for dinner last night. According to Putu Pradhana et al (2024), the contemporary work environment is marked by a mix of ages and values, which not only encourages creativity but can also lead to conflicts between generations because of varying values, perspectives, and work habits. Studies suggest that younger generations are generally more involved in their jobs, while older generations have more commitment to the organizations. When Robert enters the room, he seems to ignore Christopher as if he is not there, and he keeps talking about last night while Bruce is trying to introduce Christopher to him.

"In the meantime, Bruce finally introduces Robert to Christopher as Dr. Smith, a senior consultant, and notes that he has invited Robert to sit in on their session. Robert. This introduction seems to make Christopher a bit uneasy. Christopher makes an interesting comment when Bruce introduces him to Robert:

Robert (to Christopher): Hello.

Bruce: You remember Christopher? Chris, do you remember Doctor Smith? Senior Consultant.

Christopher: Warning warning warning! Alien life form approaching, Will Robinson". (Penhall, 2000, p.14)

The line said by Christopher is taken from the famous sci-fi TV show "Lost in Space". According to an article published by Charles W. Shifley Banner Witcoff (2018), in the 1960s, there was a science fiction television series

titled "Lost in Space" which featured a robot named Robot that could detect danger and warn the crew members. This phrase turned into a famous popular phrase, emphasizing the robot's position as a protector of the youngest Robinson. It seems that Christopher is warning the two from the danger of the conflict which eventually is going to happen between the two psychiatrists. Robert is carrying a cup of coffee and for Christopher it is everything he asks for; however, Bruce does not allow him to drink coffee as it has side effects on his condition. Nonetheless, Robert seems to be overstepping professional boundaries by getting involved and interfering in Bruce's work throughout giving the pack of cigarettes to Christopher and lighting one for him. Robert believes that Christopher is leaving in 24 hours, therefore, his action yields from the perception that he is no longer a patient. Robert asks Bruce to give him coffee telling him that Christopher is going home, then he offers his cup of coffee to Christopher. Then the three men quarrel, with Christopher managing to take some cigarettes while Bruce ends up drinking Robert's coffee all at once. Christopher mentions that in just a day, he will be free to do whatever he wants, and it turns out he has already got his bags ready to go. The consultation gets pretty chaotic as Christopher grows more restless, prompting Bruce to remind him that people outside the hospital might see his actions as and he quotes Christopher 'an "uppity nigger" (Penhall, 2000, p.19).

Bruce and Robert begin talking about Christopher's situation and ask him to go to another room for a while. As Christopher leaves, he mentions he hopes they are not changing their minds about letting him go home since his "twenty-eight days are up." Bruce tells Robert he wants to re-evaluate Christopher's condition, who is currently under Section 2 of the mental health. According to the NHS, section 2 permits an individual to be hospitalized for a maximum of 28 days to evaluate if they are experiencing a mental disorder. The argument about Christopher's situation between the two doctors is intensified when they start discussing it. When Bruce asks Robert to have his patient to be placed in Section 3, Robert asks him to forget that he "even thought of it" (Penhall, 2000, p. 23). Robert tells him that what he is doing is right and is based on medical textbooks but he also claims that there are not enough beds in the hospital. Furthermore, Robert starts to exercise his power and position as a senior consultant. According to Boles, Robert's behavior can be attributed to the fact that he sees himself in a position of power, and that whatever statement he makes is right and should be followed without questioning. This type of behavior is described as "paternalistic" (Boles, 2014). Hovan George et al define the term paternalism in the realm of health and medical care, as assuming control over an individual's decision-making ability by preventing them from pursuing what they believe is best for their health, meddling in their

decision-making process, or applying one's own judgment (George et al, 2022). While they may both have the attitude of making the decision, Robert seems to be the controlling and the one who acts as the most knowledgeable. He refuses to even listen to Bruce's perspective claiming that there are not enough beds to put him in Section 3, and threatening Bruce that he should take his advice if he wants to protect his job.

Nancy Foner in *Ages in Conflict* (1984), states that the value differences between generations arise as the young are exposed to and internalize values that are quite distinct from those of the older generation. These differences in values can lead to tensions or even cause open conflicts. She believes that different events and circumstances "in turn, are likely to affect relations between age strata—often for the worse" (p.224). It is obvious how Robert and Bruce have no shared values as they both perceive Christopher's condition in a distinct way. Both, Bruce and Robert, disagree on the diagnosis of the patient, however, Robert alleged a diagnosis based on assumptions as an expert consultant. The differences in perception regarding work-related matters are more pronounced than the real differences between younger and older generations. Additionally, the way different generations view things like work values, attitudes and beliefs about work, work behaviors, and leadership styles can lead to conflicts in the workplace (Ho and Yeung, 2020).

Robert uses his power and position to threaten Bruce to fulfill his ambition of becoming a professor while convincing and manipulating Bruce to follow "his advice to get him to climb the ladder of workplace.

Robert: Well, your Specialist Registrar Training. And I said, for the coming year I am prepared to supervise you, I'll be your 'Mentor', I'll teach you 'all I know' . . . but you have to play the game.

Bruce: 'Play the game?'

Robert: That's right. I'll push your barrow. I'll feed the scrum but you're going to have to kick the ball into touch once in a while.

Bruce: But

Robert: Take my advice, if you keep your nose clean and you enjoy psychiatry, you'll almost certainly become a consultant. Nevertheless, you don't want to be a consultant for ever. Sooner or later you'll want to become a Senior. You too may one day seek a professorship (Penhall, 2000, p. 24).

Robert tries to convince Bruce to do what is, in his perspective, right for both of them as employees in the NHS. Here, Penhall is not only presenting generational conflict on the personal level, in fact, he is presenting a conflict

on a border scale; a corrupted institution that encourages falsity at the expense of powerless patients like Christopher. Bruce, who is new to the field, is trying to abide by his values and is doing his best to prove himself. On the other hand, Robert, who is a senior consultant and considers himself an expert, is advising him to play the game to climb the ladder even if it requires moral turpitude. Generational conflicts can arise from real differences between age groups, like actual variations in work values, work attitudes, psychological traits, personality, work ethics, and conflict management. Additionally, perceived generational differences, such as perceived variations in work values (Ho and Yeung, 2020). Bruce has different work values from Robert, he thinks that it is his duty, based on his diagnosis, to move Christopher to Section 3. Conversely, Robert thinks that Christopher should get his freedom and go back to his people.

The conflict grows bigger as they both disagree on the diagnosis of Christopher. Bruce, the young emulous and rebellious young doctor wants to not only prove his perspective, but to challenge Robert, the haughty, senior consultant. The two doctors keep arguing about the best types of psychiatric care and disagreeing on definitions of conditions and Christopher's diagnosis. The truth is that Robert admits that they both disagree, but he refuses to resection Christopher "on the basis of a difference of opinion" (Penhall, 2000, p.28). He does not only refuse to resection Christopher because they have different opinions, he believes that his opinion is "my semantics are better than yours so I win" (Penhall, 2000, p. 28). The conflict between the two doctors goes beyond merely different values. The way they perceive Christopher as a black patient is also different. As the two doctors represent their age cohorts, each of them has his own racist attitude towards Christopher. According to Boles, the cultural background in which they play has been influenced by the era in which Britain has experienced the highest racist attitudes towards black people. During the 1960s and 1970s when the three Commonwealth Immigration Acts were passed "(one in 1962, another in 1968, and the last in 1971)", each one compacted the restrictions on non-white citizens trying to move to England (Boles, 2014). The idea of race is examined in *Blue/Orange* to investigate schizophrenia not merely as a medical condition but also as a cultural issue. This raises various connected topics like power, knowledge, authority, agency, and social control. Penhall seems to imply that clinical perspectives on schizophrenia, such as those from Bruce, are evidently simplistic and often overlook the relationship between culture and schizophrenia (Fakhrkonandeh and Sümbül, 2021).

Although both of the doctors are racist, Robert is very careful of his language, however, being all these years in the institution, he knows how to

address any issues by using his wittiness to play with words. For example, Robert's racist attitude towards Christopher when he tells Bruce that Christopher's attitude might be a cultural thing "where he comes from" (Penhall, 2000, p. 31). On the other hand, Bruce tries his best to hide it and use alternative words to describe Christopher's behavior at the beginning of the play; which later is going to cause problems and affect the relationship between Bruce and Christopher. For Boles, Robert, who is in his fifties, is influenced by the racist behavior against black people in Britain at that time. Being among his age group, Boles (2014) states, "he becomes a generational representative" for how racism is perceived in his era. Although Robert is influenced by his racist era, he is cautious when he speaks about Christopher. He does not tell him directly that Christopher is psychotic because he is black, but he mentions that Christopher suffers from sanity due to his environment as he states, "sanity is a conditional response to environment" (Penhall, 2000, p. 32). Bruce is shocked by what he is saying though he has his own prejudices, too. Nonetheless, as Nelson Rosário and Daniela Rocha (2024) states that it seems like Bruce's own biases influence how he acts and speaks to Christopher. Christopher, on the other hand, feels like he is being targeted and judged because of his race. According to Rosário and Rocha (2024), throughout history, there have been many times when Caucasians had the power to make choices that impacted the lives of Black people. Some stereotypes and a feeling of superiority still found in a society where fascism and different types of racism are slowly becoming more common. In other words, Christopher feels he is abundant due to his cultural background as a black man. When he enters the room at the time Bruce and Robert are having the conversation, Robert asks him when he is leaving. Christopher tells him that he is leaving in 24 hours. When Robert asks him if he has a place to go, Bruce replies that he is going to a "White city". Christopher says that does not like white city. Robert seems to be interfering in Bruce's work as he keeps asking Christopher questions to get more information about why he does not like to go to a white city. Christopher tells him that he gets "stopped a lot in White City" (Penhall, 2000, p.36). According to Boles (2014), the police department's stop-and-search policy, which saw a significant increase during Thatcher's time, was rooted in racism and had a direct impact on the mental health of black victims. If someone is stopped frequently, they might start to distrust everyone, and as a result, their behavior could show signs of that paranoia.

The conversation between Robert and Christopher continues and Christopher tells Robert that he wants to go to Uganda, where his dad lives. Bruce's racist behavior towards Christopher appears at the last scenes when he feels that his job is at risk and he longer in danger. Although at the beginning of the play, Bruce seems to be protecting him, in fact, for

Christopher, Bruce is controlling. When Christopher asks for a coke, Bruce rejects. Christopher tells him that as soon as his 24 hours' end, he would be a free man. Additionally, the relationship between him and Bruce starts a phase of degradation. When Bruce feels that he is on the edge of losing his position, he shows his true and shocking reality to Christopher. Bruce's cruelty against Christopher as a black man appears intensely after he feels he is unable to keep his position. In act three, Bruce and Christopher meet to discuss the report, it seems that Christopher files it because he thinks Bruce is racist. Christopher tells Bruce that he should not call him 'uppity nigger' from the very beginning, but Bruce admits that he quoted what he said. Bruce feels that this report is not written by Christopher, on the contrary, it is written by someone who wants to get rid of him. Bruce believes that Robert has written to take care of his patient. He wants control over Christopher to finish his research. Although both doctors are racists, Robert as a senior consultant knows how to use his words to avoid situations like these. However, he uses his power to direct things towards his needs as the readers see at the end of act three .

Bruce insists to prove his point therefore he requests from Robert to stay while he asks his patient a few questions to prove his mental illness. Bruce asks the patient what he notices in the fruit bowl, and Christopher replies that the oranges are blue from inside and outside. Christopher tells them that his father's favorite fruit is orange oranges. Then Bruce asks him who his father is. Christopher mentions, quite hesitant, that his dad was the former dictator of Uganda, Idi Amin. Christopher tells them his story that his mom was kicked off because Idi Amin, his father, did not like foreigners including Christopher's mom, therefore, they were all kicked off Uganda. Christopher's delusional story exacerbates the conflict between the two psychiatrists. Instead of believing it, Robert makes a new assumption about Christopher's life. As Bruce tells Christopher to return to his ward; Christopher feels that something is not right and looks for reassurance that he will still be going home. Robert assures him that he is going home. On Christopher's delusional story Antony Weir (2022), argues that Christopher connects the story to his father who used to get oranges when he was in exile. Thus, it could be true or it could be not. The two psychiatrists see the story differently; Weir (2022), states that Bruce's interpretation of Christopher's story is the result of his cultural background as a white doctor treating a black patient. On the other hand, Robert's interpretation of Christopher's story is in fact based on his understanding of the Afro- Caribbean medical diagnoses, which he is doing a study on, are inherently ethnocentric, influenced by culture.

For the senior doctor, Christopher's condition is his chance to find out a cure

for black people in Britain as Bruce seeks a self-recognition as a young doctor in his first years of training. Nancy Foner in *Ages and Conflict* states, “old men have greater opportunity than younger men to control resources” (Nancy Foner, 1984, p.34). She believes that there is inequality between old and young and that older people usually use their power and authority to control resources. Apparently, Robert is using his authority and power of knowledge to prove Bruce wrong. Additionally, his exercise of power against Bruce is vivid in the way he threatens Bruce. By the end of act one, the conflict grows bigger when Bruce disagrees with Robert about how he sees Christopher’s condition. Robert assures him that he is the “expert” and he is here to be consulted because he knows (Penhall, 2000, p. 49). Then Bruce accuses Robert of being racist when says that the patient is BPD unlike how Bruce sees the condition. Robert tells Bruce that he should remember that he is under his supervision and his subordinate and tells him that young doctors beg him to supervise them, “Do you know what most young doctors would do to have me as Supervisor? I mean, normal ones . . . the smart ones . . . what they’d do to know they have a future. To have a shot at becoming Consultant? They’d lick my anus” (Penhall, 2000, p.51).

It becomes challenging for Bruce to even talk. Robert leads the conversation this time to prove his point and to use his power against the young doctor. He threatens him of “taking him off this case” (Penhall, 2000, p. 51) if he does not listen to him but Bruce is not satisfied with these claims so he tells Robert that he will appeal to the authorities if he takes him off the case just because he does what he thinks is right. Robert tells him that he is the authority. It is obviously a competition for rewards as Nancy Foner (1984) argues. She states that in some societies the older ones get, more rewards could be gained. Thus, younger people are eagerly in a waiting phase for these rewards and getting frustrated waiting for their turn while older people are getting in the way. Bruce sees Robert getting in the way of proving himself and doing what in his opinion right. He sees Robert as racist senior doctor using his power against a young doctor who is still in training. Bruce complains that Robert does not listen to him, however, Robert tells him that he is not here to listen to him and it is Bruce’s job to listen. Then Robert tries to prove his point why they cannot keep Christopher in the wards. He tells Bruce that Schizophrenia is one of the taboos and it is not curable. As a young doctor, Bruce is eager to make a change of how people see Schizophrenia thus he tells Robert that they should change it. Nonetheless, Robert as he has been quite a good time in this institution, he knows that this is cannot be altered. Therefore, he tells Bruce that the authority would wonder why he is insisting on it. Eventually, they would think that this case has deeper significance which may affect him badly to the level that they may question his “mental wellness” (Penhall, 2000, p. 53).

Apparently, there must be some rewards in the line that still need to be gained. He mentioned at the beginning that he is the authority, however now, he is telling Bruce that the authority might question his wellbeing which shows his discrepancy as a senior doctor who belongs to a corrupted institution. Penhall presents an issue that has an effect not only on the personal level, but on the institutional level. He models in Robert the senior, intellectually rigid and authoritative doctor who is the result of a corrupted institution; on the other hand, he models in Bruce the impulsive young doctor who challenges the rules put by older doctors seeking a change which fits his values. However, is it possible that one of them could be right and win the debate? That is what Penhall questions throughout the play and what he wants his audience to discover by the end of the play.

Robert's intention is revealed when he starts talking about the benefits he could get if he found out the cure for black psychosis. His main aim is to become a professor to get more privileges. Therefore, he keeps reminding the reader that his biggest fears are academia and failing to become a professor. The competition between Robert and Bruce takes a different direction. It becomes now a competition for resources and who controls them. It is as Nancy Foner states "Clashes over beliefs and values, including over who is judged to have the right to control resources and make decisions" (Foner, 1984, p. 225).

Now Robert is talking to Christopher alone and he starts to manipulate Christopher to get more information about him. When Christopher tells him that he does not want to go home, Robert asks him why and Christopher replies that people stare at him as if they know something about him. Christopher admits that he has no home or friends. He feels lonely and he tells Robert that it is hard for him to make friends and to get a girlfriend. He admits that he is "being harassed" (Penhall, 2000, p. 63) by people and everywhere he goes. In fact, and from the beginning of the play, Christopher is being harassed, by the two psychiatrists who are racist. It starts with Bruce telling him how to act and then Robert ignores him until he finally admits that he is detested by people everywhere. Robert as a white senior psychiatrist care for nothing but his research that he is actually doing on Afro-Caribbean people. Christopher tells Robert that people call him a "jungle boy". For Christopher, white people look like zombies as he calls them and he thinks "they look half dead. It's that ghostly white skin" (Penhall, 2000, p. 64).

Christopher keeps describing white people as "dangerous" and "baldy head", however, Robert cares about nothing but manipulating him. He asks him if he is sick or not; Christopher admits that he is sick and he has been lying and he does not want to go home. He feels scared and he admits that

he is not ready to leave. Robert seems disappointed by what he hears from Christopher, so he insists on convincing Christopher that he actually wants to leave. As a senior and as he calls himself in his words “an expert”, he knows how to direct things towards his needs. In fact, for both doctors, what matters for them is their job but not the patient. Here Penhall depicts the character of an older and powerful doctor who is ready to use his authority and cunning to achieve his goals.

According to Thabet, Robert (2020), carefully chooses his words to manipulate Christopher, even in terms of racism he knows what words to use avoiding a conflict with Christopher. Being able to play with words, Robert tries to convince Christopher that he does not want to leave and he is controlled by his subconscious. Christopher gets confused when Robert tells him that he unconsciously quotes what others tell him so he feels deceived by Bruce. He starts to think that he read Bruce’s mind but he remembers that the oranges he saw were “bright blue”. Robert is still not convinced that he is sick so he tells him that things looked strange when he had psychosis. The climax of the play reaches the peak when Robert starts weaving the events to make Christopher believe that Bruce is racist against him and that he is the one who should take over his case.

For Robert, Bruce is a threat that he should get rid of and the only way he can achieve this is by controlling Christopher and falsifying the truth. He tells him that Bruce is “a little as we say in trade” (Penhall, 2000, p.74) and that he should take over his case because he is the head of the department and as in his words “I am the Boss. I am the big cheese (Penhall, 2000, p. 73)”. Robert being in a position of power makes him believe that he is the one who should look after Christopher's condition. He sees in his condition hopes and dreams for achieving academic excellence. He uses his authority and cunning to manipulate Christophe to make him believe things as he knows that this is the only way to get rid of Bruce to achieve his goals. In fact, Christopher at first is convinced that Bruce is just worried about him, but after his talk with Robert, things change. When Robert tells Christopher about his book, Christopher is curious about Bruce’s opinion. Robert tells him that he has not read the book. Christopher asks him what Bruce thinks about him seeing Robert:

Christopher: I meant about me seeing you.

Robert Oh well . . . OK . . . well, the thing is . . . see. Doctor Flaherty isn’t in possession of the full facts.

Christopher Why not?

Robert Because he’s not an authority. I’m an authority. He isn’t.

Because there are things you do and things you believe which he, within his culture, can only recognize as Insanity. Which I personally believe, for what it's worth, is rather narrow-minded . . . it's what some people call 'Culturally Oppressive' (Penhall, 2000, p. 74)".

Robert also justifies what he said about Bruce being racist is due to his culture, but he admits that he, as a young doctor, has little knowledge. However, Christopher is convinced that Bruce is racist and the only reason that makes him stay here might be because he is "punished for his color" (Penhall, 2000, p. 75). Now that Christopher heard all of this, he starts to believe that Bruce is actually racist. He mentions that Bruce calls him 'black' and 'voodoo' and that Bruce lied to him. It is time for Bruce and Christopher to talk. Christopher seems mad at Bruce because of what Robert told him about Christopher. Bruce notices that the report says he used words like 'nigger'. Robert comes in and he seems aware of what is going on. Robert asks to see Bruce alone to talk to him about the report.

The confrontation between the two doctors escalates. Bruce thinks that Robert is responsible for the report because he is the authority. Nonetheless, Robert stutters when he talks to Bruce telling him that he is not always the authority. According to Nancy Foner, competition for rewards between old and young is limited to age, thus this waiting period is "frustrating for the young" (Foner, 1984, p.30). Bruce is cooped now between clinging to his own values and beliefs and his own future as psychiatric. He seeks an answer about who is responsible for the report. He knows that he disagrees with Robert so he questions him seeking clarification as the 'authority'. The clash between the two intensifies and now Robert has to make things clear. When Bruce says that monkeys could do better than this report, Robert seems to be threatening him things could be easily misinterpreted. Bruce feels that he is losing his position and Robert is going to take over the case, he gets angry so he articulates his perspective about Robert. Bruce tells Robert that he actually wants to take over the patient because he wants to finish his research:

You'll be the toast of Academia the World Over. Imagine! A golden opportunity to distinguish yourself from all the other boffins; To be the Eggiest Egg Head of them all; to be different from all the other odious little careerists on the gravy train kissing management ass. To be Up There with all the other Cambridge wonder boys in their bow ties and tweed, flapping about the 'corridors of power' with their pricks in each other's pockets. What's wrong with just doing your job.

Now that Bruce has nothing to lose, he outrageously confronts Robert with his intentions. Robert wants to take over Christopher's condition only to do

his research, therefore he could get anything he could dream of the rewards. Robert threatens him when he hears this saying that he is “already the subject for an inquiry” (Penhall, 2000, p. 86). Bruce tries to make things right, nonetheless, his effort is to no avail.

Being a young doctor, he is impulsive, he thinks that he is losing his job because the authority is competing and challenging him. Therefore, he is now in an awkward situation, Bruce decides to tell Robert what he thinks of his research, but this is going to affect him because he is in a position of no power. When Robert asks him why he is threatened by his ideas Bruce says “Because they’re shit, Doctor. The research is banal and it’s all been done before anyway. It’s Old News... It isn’t empirical” (Penhall, 2000, p. 89). Robert keeps threatening him that he would be under investigation. Bruce tries to defend himself; he tells Robert that his diagnosis is ‘arbitrary’ and that he has not interviewed him. They both disagree on the diagnosis of Christopher, while Bruce thinks that he is schizophrenic, Robert thinks that he is depressed because he is in the hospital. Robert assures him that he has done all the examinations for his condition this morning. Bruce now feels hopeless as he cannot do anything to prove his perspective, thus he seeks empathy from Robert when he says “you’re not going to show me any support here, are you? As my supervisor? As a mentor? A friend?” (Penhall, 2000, p. 94). Bruce is helpless now, he is doing whatever he could do to be in his place, but he seems to be losing the debate. Robert is so confident, and he tells him not to take things personally, but Bruce thinks that Robert betrayed him:

“Bruce: Because it is personal. You’re somebody I trusted. I confided in. I thought you were on my side. I thought you and me could make a difference. Which is why I invited you over. My wife cooked. Nourished you. I should have choked you.

Robert: Bruce. You wanted me for your supervisor. Your mentor. You expect me to recommend your consultancy one day (Penhall, 2000, p. 95).”

Penhall characterized in Bruce the image of a hopeless, weak and young doctor, who despite his commitment to his values ends up giving up to a corrupted institution controlled by power. This does not deny the fact that he also wants to climb the ladder, but as a young and impulsive doctor, his one and only hope is to make a change. His last hope is Christopher’s answers. He tries to question him for the last time hoping that his answers would be supportive of his perception. He turns to Christopher and asks him if he was annoyed by his questions last time. Christopher looks at Robert. It is obvious that Robert had his hand in this conflict. Bruce asks Christopher to look at him and not Robert. Christopher says that he wants coke and Bruce

tells him that he would get one if admits that he was not upset when he asked him to peel the oranges. Christopher says 'No'.

Apparently, both doctors have manipulated Christopher to achieve their goals, but power seems to control the scene. Although Christopher admits that the color of the oranges is blue in his own words, Robert seems dissatisfied with that. What Penhall does now is so profound to present his point, he has both characters manipulating Christopher, however what the reader finds out by the end of the play is completely different. Penhall uses Christopher's mental illness to expose the corruption of the institution in which power is prevalent. When Bruce keeps asking him about the color of the oranges and what association it has, he replies to Idi Amin; however, the shocking truth to Robert is when Bruce tells him that Christopher admits this morning that his father was Mohammed Ali. When Christopher talked to Robert earlier, he showed him the news about Idi Amin that he used to "get a delivery of East African Oranges..." and that he is married to four wives, has "forty-three children" (Penhall, 2000, p. 61). Christopher earlier admits to Robert that his mom is the fifth one and that is a secret, but now that he admits to Bruce his father is someone else which makes Bruce skeptical about his condition: "What makes me uncomfortable is that this morning he told me his father was Muhammad Ali" (Penhall, 2000, p. 98). Even though Christopher admits this, Robert seems to be confined to his perspective so he warns Bruce if continues doing so, he would be denied. Now Bruce feels it is the breaking point between him winning the debate or losing his job. He tries for the last time with Christopher and asks him so he asks Robert to have a minute with Christopher, but he disagrees. Robert finally agrees to give him a moment. Instead of making things clear and right, Bruce makes it worse as he does not get what he wants from Christopher. However, it seems that Robert succeeds in manipulating Christopher. Christopher tells Bruce that he "put his thoughts in [his] head" (Penhall, 2000, p. 105).

Bruce knows that he is losing this debate anyways, so he tries to convince him that it is Robert that he put words in his mouth. Nonetheless, his attempt to persuade him has failed. Christopher insists that it is Bruce that he wants him to stay and that he is a racist. Bruce gets angry because his only hope was for Christopher to admit what he said earlier about the oranges. For Bruce, his job is on the line but he is no longer able to do anything about it. Since he is getting nothing from Christopher, Bruce talks aggressively to Christopher, "They're black! All your neighbors are. It's a black neighborhood. You you you moron. You stupid fool. Are you retarded?... You didn't know if you were Arthur or Martha when you came in here and this is the thanks I get. Now you're upset. Now I've upset you" (Penhall, 2000, p.108). Now that he has nothing to lose, he freely and openly becomes

a racist and calls Christopher ‘moron’ and ‘fool’. Meanwhile, Robert enters the room trying to interpret what Christopher says figuratively saying that ‘neighbors could be everybody’ and blaming cultural oppression as the cause for their hospitals to be filled with people like Christopher.

Robert asks Christopher if he wants to “lodge a complaint to the authority” (Penhall, 2000, p. 111). However, he says no, thus Robert orders him to get ready to leave. Meanwhile Bruce apologizes to Christopher and he admits to Robert that he messed up. The struggle for resources becomes ‘survival for the fittest’. Apparently, Robert is the fittest as he is the ‘authority’. Bruce still wants to try to keep his position after all what he did, he confesses that this disagreement has led to that conflict. He gives up on his values for the sake of keeping his position. He also wants a share of the resources specially ‘power’ as he sees Robert freely enjoys it and makes use of it. He tells Robert that he is a good supervisor, and he is grateful to him for “putting [him] straight” (Penhall, 2000, p. 114)”. However, when Bruce asks Robert to buy him a drink, Robert disagrees, admitting that he does not like Bruce, then he tells why he does not like him: Robert: “You talk too much. You get in the way (Penhall, 2000, p. 115)”. He admits that he gets in his way; thus, the best thing to do is dislodge him by manipulating the patient. No further attempts remain for Bruce; therefore, he tells Robert that he wants to “lodge a complaint with the authority” (Penhall, 2000, p. 101) and he tells him that he is ready to write a statement. Bruce tries his best to cope with it at first, for a moment he was submissive, but still could do nothing about it. He is neither able to achieve his goals, nor he is able to abide by his values.

4. Conclusion

Penhall presents to his readers a conflict that started with a disagreement between two different generations and ended up with a struggle for resources and power. His characters appear to not only be racist, but they are only concerned about their career and its future. He, through their conflict, exposes the corrupt institution that provides equal opportunities. Instead of listening to Bruce and embracing his perspective, Robert sees in him a rival that stands in his way preventing him from achieving his goals. Although the play centers around the diagnosis of the black patient, Christopher, as borderline; Penhall metaphorically exposes the white psychiatrists’ insecurities. In “Navigating Toxic Parental Relationship: A Study of Attachment Theory in August Wilson’s Fence” Zainab Abbas and Marwa Mohammed (2024) argue that, in the workplace, individuals who does not have attachment problems and they feel secure, can openly communicate their ideas and feeling with others. In the play, both doctors having difficulty sharing their ideas especially Bruce as he is afraid to be misunderstood of being racist. It is known that communication is the ability of endurance in any relationship, yet in *Blue\Orange*, a lack of communication is seen

throughout the play. Bruce, as a young doctor, lacks the skill of communication. His impulsiveness drives him to insult his supervisor's research instead of trying to understand his perspective. Both doctors were narrow-minded and decided to ignore what the other thinks. As someone new to the 'trade', as Robert likes to call it, Bruce does not know how to handle situations of disagreement. Robert, who is in a position of power, took advantage of that to show Bruce how weak he is as a young doctor. While change comes with the new generation, readers can notice that it is sometimes hard for older generations to embrace change. It is as Nancy Foner (1984), says "hard to separate old men's control over material resources from their people power (p.33)". For Robert, he still wants to enjoy power and the control of resources; he sees in Bruce the rival who is in haste to climb the ladder to get over the rewards. Penhall leaves it to his reader to decide whether it is time to embrace change and new ideas or should corruption demolish society and keep struggling over who should be in charge of power and resources.

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